



EKDOTIKE ATHENON S.A.,
ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM
OF HERAKLEION, CRETE

All have not the same speech . . .

Inscrutable relic from ancient Cretan archives, the Phaistos Disk (above) has baffled scholars since its discovery around 1900. Some think it an import, since it differs from recognizable early Minoan hieroglyphics and was found alongside a tablet written in Linear A—the yet undeciphered system of Cretan writing. Others think the Minoans devised more than one set of symbols, and later used them as sacred script concurrent with Linear A.

Impressed with 241 pictogram seals, this 3,600-year-old clay disk holds the earliest known example of printing. Covering both sides, 61 “words”—separated by lines and

arranged in spiral form—perhaps express a hymn to a divinity.

Deciphering Linear B, a milestone accomplishment in 1952, revealed so much, yet so little. For years the script (facing page) had been seen as a Minoan evolution of their older Linear A. Its presence on both Crete and the mainland suggested a strong Minoan influence over the Mycenaeans. But when a young English scholar, Michael Ventris, found it to be a primitive form of classical Greek, just the opposite became clear: Mycenaeans had taken over Knossos around 1450 B.C. and imposed their language on the Minoans. But that revelation was somewhat clouded when the translations revealed no records of events—only long and monotonous inventories and statistics.